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ABSTRACT

A survey concerning peer observations of non-tenured teachers was administered in the Clarkston Public School District (Michigan). The goal was to obtain opinions about retaining peers to observe non-tenured teachers in the tenure receiving process. Of the 150 principals, tenured teachers, and non-tenured teachers surveyed, 86 responded. The results were compared differentiating between principals, tenured teachers, and non-tenured teachers, and then compared together as a whole. The data indicate that a majority of the respondents believe that principals do not have sufficient time to devote to comprehensive assessment of new teachers, thus rendering one-person observations and evaluations inadequate. The majority of respondents prefer a collective approach (peer observations), which entails a multidisciplinary approach to tenure evaluation that is fair, balanced, and instructional with a reduced tendency for bias. The Peer Observation Survey is appended. (Contains 5 tables noting comments and 12 references). (Author/SM)

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ED 413 307

Peer Observations and Promoting Teacher Tenure Recommendations

By Amy Martocci

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Abstract

A survey concerning peer observations of non-tenured teachers was administered in the Clarkston Public School District. The goal was to obtain opinions about retaining peers to observe non-tenured teachers in the tenure receiving process. Of the 150 principals, tenured teachers, and non-tenured teachers surveyed, 86 responded. The results were compared differentiateing between principals, tenured teachers and non-tenured teachers, and then compared together as a whole. A table notes their comments. The data indicates that a majority of the respondents believe that principals do not have sufficient time to devote to comprehensive assessment of new teachers; thus rendering one person observations and evaluations as being inadequate. The majority of respondents prefer a collective approach (peer observations), which entail a multidiscipline approach to tenure evaluation that is fair, balanced and instructional with a reduced tendency for bias.

The process of determining tenure for probationary teachers often incites a mixture of emotions which may include frustration, disappointment, confusion, uncertainty, anxiety, excitement, and finally relief or trauma. These emotions may be generated by the present tenure assessment system which relies heavily on observations made by an administrator. Imagine a new teacher being observed by a principal who has 6 other new teachers to evaluate and support. Or perhaps, the teacher does not have a positive relationship with the principal and disagrees with his/her teaching philosophy. Conversely, a teacher may be observed by a principal with fresh, innovative ideas who has ample time to get to know the teacher and his/her teaching style. It is therefore apparent that this sole observer system for tenure determination can be erratic.

The current system for attaining tenure in the Clarkston School District is to promote and maintain professional growth. The evaluator or principal along with the probationary teacher develops an Individualized Development Plan (IDP) assisting the teacher in attaining competency in two areas. The probationary teacher, with guidance from the administrator chooses three goals to enhance his/her classroom management and instructional delivery skills. The administrator then offers support and techniques to aid the teacher in executing these goals. The probationary teacher is observed by the administrator twice within the school year with a pre and post - observation conference. Clarkston Schools also supplies each new teacher with a mentor teacher to offer guidance. New IDP goals are established each year and submitted to the Department of Human

Resources at the end of the year. After 4 years, the Board of Education votes on tenure recommendations for probationary teachers.

The Clarkston Public School District appears to have a thorough assessment plan of probationary teachers. However, it is likely that one of the above scenarios could take place. Without fault to the administrator, he/she may have too many new teachers to work with in one year, feel burned out, or not current on new teaching methods. This may hinder the evaluation process by either discouraging a competent teacher, promoting an incompetent teacher, or not providing adequate support to create a competent teacher.

Literature Review

> Peer Review. Teaching colleagues observe each other's classroom and examine lesson plans, tests, and graded assignments. Peer review examines a wider scope of teaching activities that other methods. Disadvantages include time consumption and possible peer conflict. Formative application features may justify the time demands and minimize sources of tension. (Barber and Klein, 1983; Elliot and Chidley, 1985; Barrett, 1986)

One possible way to alleviate this potential problem is by retaining a peer to help in the evaluation process of a probationary teacher. In the article "Where We Stand" by Albert Shanker (1996), he describes The Toledo Federation of Teachers' peer review program which began its operations in 1981. This is a system developed by the teacher union in collaboration with their school district. It was believed that the lack of quality time spent with the new teachers by administrators was diminishing the legitimacy of evaluations. This program enables experienced, consulting teachers to observe and work with probationary teachers one-on-one when they need it. The consulting teachers spend up to 3 years training and evaluating the new teacher. At the completion of the

probationary period the peer reviewers make recommendations about who should be offered tenure and who should be terminated. The evaluating teachers were found to be more accurate and conscientious than the administrators, and the authors feel this system is valid because it is important for teachers as a profession to take responsibility for themselves. The peer evaluators were more critical of their colleagues than administrators. In the first year of this program consulting teachers rated 10.5 percent of their new teachers less than satisfactory, compared to 4 percent by administrators. Another 5 percent of the new teachers were recommended for expulsion as compared to 1.6 percent of those evaluated by principals. Results for subsequent years have remained consistent with the first year's reports.

The authors (cited in Shanker, 1996) of "Don't Let Teacher Evaluations Become a Ritual," describe how undeserving most evaluations are. They cite their survey of 35 school districts in eastern Pennsylvania, that showed 98 percent of the teachers were given perfect scores. The prospect of such perfect teaching is thought simply to be from hasty evaluations which meant that administrators were not noticing below average teaching. However, the authors don't seem to believe this to be occurring only in eastern Pennsylvania: " We suspect that inflated scores on teacher evaluations are common. And these scores are a sign that teacher supervision and evaluation are in trouble in many school systems" (p.2).

Peer intervention and observation may be an effective method to support the development of probationary teachers and to deter inadequate evaluations. Margaret

Wheatley (1992), the author of Leadership and the New Science Learning about Organization from an Orderly Universe , believes that being observed by many individuals is critical. She states that it is nearly impossible for one individual to be completely thorough and 100% objective. Also, there is only one interpretation of their potentialities and they may not meet the expectations of that particular observer. Thus, labeling may occur which can be passed on, possibly unfairly throughout a person's career. Wheatly asks, "Why would we stay locked in our belief that there is one right way to do something, or one correct interpretation to a situation, when the universe welcomes diversity and seems to thrive on a multiplicity of meanings?" She is convinced that because of different interpretations many individuals may have of the same event, that many observations, by different people, can create an environment for different potentials to thrive.

If increasing instructional effectiveness is the primary goal for schools, then a peer coaching, supervision and evaluation program should be a reality (Stanley & Popham, 1988). It is important to note that the expert teachers involved with this program are there to assist in the evaluation process. They are there to augment, not replace, the principal's efforts. One of the authors, Madeline Hunter (1988), believes this to be one element of a full staff development program. She believes that if peer coaching and supervision were to be implemented it would enhance collegial relationships and allow for more collaboration and sharing among teachers, increasing and continuing professional growth. Marcella Verdun, Principal of Herman Elementary School in Detroit, Michigan uses this staff development model and states, "In addition to improving teachers'

instructional effectiveness, Hunter's model improves the proficiency of those who evaluate the teachers."

While peer observation seems to be an agreeable addition to a probationary teacher's evaluation, there are some who disagree. Philip Glover (1995), was an English teacher involved in a case study regarding peer observations. He worked with and coached a British teacher of English in which they observed each other. They were not colleagues in the same school and therefore the post observation discussions were considered uncomfortable. He states that it is difficult to determine aims for this kind of observation. The observer is to assume that he/she knows what is right and can focus on just the right things that the observed teacher can improve on. It is likely the observer chooses to comment on an area that the observed teacher is not willing to attend to. The result may be that the observer feels compelled to justify and defend his/her actions rather than to reflect openly on them.

During the final review of this British teacher of English, the author noted many of her comments. She found observing "much more enjoyable" than being observed. While the observer's goal was to be non-judgmental and non-prescriptive, the observed teacher felt that the atmosphere was different, because while being observed there is more pressure to be successful. However, she did positively note that, "To be a better teacher you need to observe and be observed" (p.3). Presently she is able to reflect on her own teaching, and is aware of what teaching techniques to "correct immediately, later or not at all."

Administrators sometimes rely on hearsay and second hand information which in turn lead to charges of favoritism. (Pruitt, 1986) Through faculty participation, improved credibility of evaluations can be achieved. Administrators are inclined to be accused of favoritism if the opinions of peers are exempt. A majority of peer evaluators will produce fair and just evaluations of their peers, without any kind of biases. (J. F. Ford & J. B. Hassel, 1984) The evaluation procedure must represent; reliability, validity, and fairness. The authors state that we can increase the reliability of peer observers as sources of evidence if we make sure that a group or committee of peers participate. There is also literature which suggests that peer observers ought to be trained for these responsibilities. The Committee on Academic Personnel notes that confidentiality of peer evaluations can sometimes be a problem. The use of peer evaluations is used for all cases of promotion or advancement, and departments should ensure that the contents of a peer evaluation letter remain confidential and come from a variety of sources.

Boyd (1989) outlined four concerns shared among teachers of the evaluation process:

1. Teachers do not have input into the evaluation criteria. Other professionals (doctors, lawyers, engineers) control the criteria for entering and maintaining membership in their profession. Teachers often do not have that privilege. State laws or school boards decide the focus of the evaluation.
2. Evaluators are not spending enough time on the evaluation. Teachers complain that the principal, or whoever is conducting the evaluation, does not have the time to gather quality information and provide useful feedback.
3. Evaluators are not well trained. Teachers site that few evaluators have any special training to help them plan and execute a successful evaluation. Even worse, many have had little or no recent experiences in

the classroom. The criteria for evaluations are often vague, subjective, and inconsistent.

4. Results of evaluations are not being used to further teacher development. For many teachers, the evaluation process can be a dead end. The results do not figure into salary increases, promotions, or any meaningful program for professional development.

"The greatest obstacle to effective evaluation is that administrators, board members and parents all have their own idea as to what exactly a great teacher is. The last people to be asked their opinion are usually those who know the most about the profession -- namely the teachers themselves" (Ruef, 1997, p. 2).

Peer evaluation can take place in a variety of ways. There are three types of peer evaluation; Formal, Informal, and Accidental. A Formal peer evaluation is non-threatening, scheduled, and can offer an opportunity to address weaknesses. Informal evaluations are encouraged as a means for new teachers to drop in on colleagues who are "master teachers." An Accidental evaluation takes place unintentionally, perhaps observing the librarian read a story to a class. A teacher evaluation system should give teachers useful feedback on classroom needs, the opportunity to learn new teaching techniques, and counsel from principals, and other teachers on how to make changes in their classrooms. (Boyd, 1989)

Method

A peer observing and helping with the administrator's evaluation is a new idea to the Clarkston Public School District. The following survey (see Appendix A) was conducted within this school district to determine the feelings and attitudes concerning this

new idea of peer observations. There were 20 questions on the survey and answers were obtained in a Lickert format 1- 5; 1 meaning strongly agree to a 5 meaning strongly disagree. The identical survey was given to 150 teachers and administrators among the 6 elementary schools in the district. Of the 150 surveyed, 86 responded. Respondents needed only to identify whether they were a principal, tenured teacher, or a non-tenured teacher. There was space provided for additional comments that was strictly an option, and yet quite frequently utilized. The subsequent tables and paragraphs will compare the results. The survey results are divided into the categories of principal, tenured teacher, and non-tenured teacher. The results are compared and reviewed as a whole and a table reviewing the comments is also provided.

Table 1

Results in percentages of survey by the principals.

Number of respondents = 5 1= Strongly agree and 5 = Strongly disagree

PO = Peer Observers Adm. = Administrators

Abbreviated Questions	1	2	3	4	5
1. Observations by Adm. are unbiased.	20%	40%	0%	40%	0%
2. Adm. perceive teacher perform. accurately.	20	40	20	20	0
3. Adm. spend quality time with new teachers.	0	40	40	20	0
4. PO would give unbiased input.	20	40	20	0	20
5. PO view new teachers differently than Adm.	60	20	20	0	0
6. Teacher tenure observations are fair & equitable.	60	20	20	0	0
7. Observations by Adm. promote quality teaching.	60	40	0	0	0
8. Peer observations hinder collegial relationships.	40	20	20	0	20
9. Peer observations should remain confidential.	80	0	0	20	0
10. Peer observations could deter receiving tenure.	20	20	40	20	0

11. Adm. give practical feedback to new teachers.	20	80	0	0	0
12. PO could offer more practical advice.	0	80	0	0	20
13. PO would be too intimidating.	20	0	20	60	0
14. PO is unnecessary.	20	0	20	0	60
15. PO is acceptable.	0	40	40	0	20
16. PO should be strict evaluators.	0	0	20	0	80
17. PO relate better to new teacher's struggles.	20	60	20	0	0
18. PO may offer support for Adm. evaluations.	0	80	0	0	20
19. PO may not have the correct skills.	20	40	40	0	0
20. Peer evaluations are unprofessional.	40	0	20	20	20

The above results provide an array of beliefs and opinion. Of the 5 principals who agreed to take the survey, there was only one who seemed to be against peer observation. The remaining 4 were open to the idea and admitted that they could not spend the quality time they would like to with a new teacher. They also agreed that while administrators give practical feedback, the peer observers could provide more helpful feedback and suggestions. Also, 80% felt that peer observers do perceive new teacher's actions differently than administrators and that they could better relate to a new teacher's struggles. Although 60% were concerned that it may hinder collegial relations, 40% felt it to be an acceptable practice. One of the principals agrees and states, "Evaluations should be a team effort between the new teacher, mentor, and principal." However, another principal adds, "Mentor teachers assigned by the principal can offer all of the above without being included in the evaluation process." Consequently, this seems to be the philosophy of the majority of the principals, because 4 of them conclude that not only

should these observations be kept confidential, but the peers definitely should not evaluate strictly. Conversely, when asked if peer observations are unprofessional only 2 of the principals strongly agreed.

A majority of the principals do not believe that peers have the correct skills to evaluate, but 4 of the 5 principals believe that information obtained from peer observations could support their evaluations of a new teacher. More than half responded that it would not be too intimidating to have a peer observer. Nearly all of the principals believe that administrative evaluations for tenure are fair and equitable and all of them agree that observations by administrators promote quality teaching. For questions 1 and 4 the results are the same; 60% believe that administrative and peer input is unbiased.

Table 2

Results in percentages of survey by tenured teachers

Number of respondents = 49 1 = Strongly agree and 5 = Strongly disagree

PO = Peer Observers Adm. = Administrators

Abbreviated Questions	1	2	3	4	5
1.Observations by Adm. are unbiased.	4%	23%	48%	19%	6%
2. Adm. perceive teacher perform. accurately.	2	12	43	31	12
3. Adm. spend quality time with new teachers.	2	4	22	38	34
4. PO would give unbiased input.	10	26	52	6	6
5. PO view new teachers differently than Adm.	41	53	6	0	0
6. Teacher tenure observations are fair & equitable.	2	22	45	27	4
7. Observations by Adm. promote quality teaching.	4	8	44	36	8
8. Peer observations hinder collegial relationships.	18	25	49	8	0
9. Peer observations should remain confidential.	65	25	8	2	0

10. Peer observations could deter receiving tenure.	12	24	34	26	4
11. Adm. give practical feedback to new teachers.	4	25	51	18	2
12. PO could offer more practical advice.	27	61	6	6	0
13. PO would be too intimidating.	6	12	30	40	12
14. PO is unnecessary.	6	10	35	41	8
15. PO is acceptable.	18	41	25	8	8
16. PO should be strict evaluators.	0	16	31	35	18
17. PO relate better to new teacher struggles.	25	51	12	6	6
18. PO may offer support for Adm. evaluations.	16	47	29	6	2
19. PO may not have the correct skills.	14	27	37	20	2
20. Peer evaluations are unprofessional.	4	2	39	30	25

Tenured teachers offered a different perspective with their answers to the survey. Surprisingly, the majority of the participants favored the concept of peer observation including this teacher who stated, "Peer evaluations demonstrate learning and teamwork. We need to feel comfortable with each other, share ideas, learn and not be intimidated. It's also more fun and energizes you." Another teacher also agreed with this and believes that peer evaluations would be beneficial for all teachers, tenured and non-tenured alike. On the contrary, one teacher did comment negatively remarking, "I certainly don't think peer observation would work. It would be very hard to accept criticism from a colleague." Another notes that it would be difficult for a peer observer to be unbiased because of different approaches to teaching.

Nearly all of the participants did not feel that administrative observations promote quality teaching. In fact, more than half of the tenured teachers believe peer observers can relate better to new teachers, and offer more practical advice than administrators. One teacher remarks, "I do not believe that we can expect the principal to be current in

the "best practices" in instruction. A good, up to date peer observer may be helpful." Also, it was agreed by 72% that administrators do not spend quality time with the new teachers and a majority conclude administrators do not perceive a new teacher's performance accurately.

A preponderance of teachers believed that training the peer observer is essential, for he/she may not exhibit the correct skills. One teacher agrees and states, "As long as the peer observer is adequately trained, I feel this would be an important aspect of any teacher's growth." Another adds, "I think if we were to implement this new strategy (which I feel is appropriate), then there needs to be some specific guidelines for the peer observer so that the non-tenured teacher gets objective and useful feedback." A greater number of the tenured teachers agreed that observations by peers could hinder collegial relationships, and 31% of the teachers agreed that teacher observations for tenure were unfair. This teacher responds, "Many times the fairness of observations and quality of the feedback depends upon the principal. It may be uncomfortable to have a peer evaluate you. It could strain working relationships."

More than half of the tenured teachers believe peer observations to be professional and an acceptable practice. A majority also concede that it would not be too intimidating to be observed by a peer. A greater number believe that peer observations could provide support to an administrator's evaluation of a new teacher. The participants are divided with their responses to questions 1 and 4. It is undetermined whether or not tenured teachers believe administrators or peers contribute unbiased information into an

evaluation. When asked if peer observations would deter the tenure process the results were divided equally and indecisive.

Table 3

Results in percentages of survey by non-tenured teachers

Number of respondents = 32 1 Strongly agree and 5 = Strongly disagree

PO = Peer Observers Adm. = Administrators

Abbreviated Questions	1	2	3	4	5
1.Observations by Adm. are unbiased.	19%	19%	50%	6%	6%
2. Adm. perceive teacher perform. accurately.	19	34	41	3	3
3. Adm. spend quality time with new teachers.	0	12	28	47	12
4. PO would give unbiased input.	15	38	32	15	0
5. PO view new teachers differently than Adm.	38	50	9	3	0
6. Teacher tenure observations are fair & equitable.	16	47	25	6	6
7. Observations by Adm. promote quality teaching.	16	22	31	19	12
8. Peer observations hinder collegial relationships.	16	12	38	25	9
9. Peer observations should remain confidential.	57	19	9	9	6
10. Peer observations could deter receiving tenure.	9	9	30	43	9
11. Adm. give practical feedback to new teachers.	16	41	25	12	6
12. PO could offer more practical advice.	31	50	16	0	3
13. PO would be too intimidating.	6	3	22	59	9
14. PO is unnecessary.	6	6	28	41	19
15. PO is acceptable.	19	47	12	16	6
16. PO should be strict evaluators.	3	9	50	23	15
17. PO relate better to a new teacher's struggles.	41	47	6	6	0
18. PO may offer support for Adm. evaluations.	25	53	16	6	0
19. PO may not have the correct skills.	12	12	44	16	16
20. Peer evaluations are unprofessional.	3	3	22	50	22

Non-tenured teachers may have a harder time answering these questions due to

lack of experience. However, many had positive comments and approved taking the mentoring process one step further. One teacher summed it up by asserting, "Mentors and non-tenured teachers seem to me that they could compliment each other. Peers would see day to day success', where administrators only see a piece of the puzzle." Another point was made by this non-tenured teacher, "Who would be better to evaluate and assist a new teacher than another teacher? They are familiar with the curriculum and the ups and downs of the classroom. Their experiences and guidance are valuable to a new teacher."

Nearly all of the non-tenured teachers said that peer observers would view their performances differently than an administrator and that peer observers relate better to a non-tenured teacher's struggles. More than half agreed that it would provide support for the administrators evaluations, that it would not be unprofessional and, that it would not deter them from receiving tenure. While 57% believed administrators perceive their performance accurately, 59% felt the administrators did not spend quality time with them. "I don't know how they know what we do! They come in such a short time," remarks a non-tenured teacher.

An overwhelming 81% agreed that peer observers offer more practical advice to new teachers and 68% said that they would not find peer observations to be intimidating. However, one teacher commented that, "I think peer observers would be great if the non-tenured teacher could help choose who would be observing. There are some teachers whose opinion of my teaching I may not respect based on differences of teaching philosophy." Another teacher's perception was, "Often, it seems that

observations are done only because the contract says they must. Observations rarely provide feedback that will help a teacher to do a better job. This type of feedback is often given by other teachers when the non-tenured teachers ask for help, and these conversations are infinitely more valuable."

A majority of the respondents believe the administrator's evaluation to be unbiased and fair and equitable. The non-tenured teachers also feel peer observers would not be biased in their observations. The data were diverse and undetermined as to whether or not peer observers have legitimate skills to evaluate and whether they should be demanding evaluators.

Comparison Data

In comparison of the three tables, it was found that the principals, tenured teachers and non-tenured teachers agree that peer evaluations should remain confidential. They also conceded that peer observers view new teachers differently than administrators, and give more practical advice. On the contrary, when asked if administrators perceive a new teacher's performance accurately, more than half of the non-tenured teachers and principals agreed, and only 14% of the tenured teachers agreed. A discrepancy in views was noticed for question #3 in regards to quality time spent with the new teachers. Nearly half of the principals believe that quality time is spent with the new teachers while only 12% of the non-tenured teachers and 8% of the tenured teachers believe this to be true.

The greatest inconsistency in responses prevails in question #7, 100% of the principals agreed that evaluations made by administrators promote quality teaching. Only

38% of the non-tenured teachers and 12% of the tenured teachers agreed. Similar replies were given when asked if administrators give practical feedback to new teachers. Again, 100% of the principals believe this to be true, while 57% of the non-tenured teachers and 29% of the tenured teachers agree.

Unlike tenured teachers, a majority of the principals and non-tenured teachers believe that teacher evaluations for tenure are fair and equitable. However, the non-tenured teachers believe that peer observers should be strict evaluators while more than half of the principals and tenured teachers do not believe that they should be strict evaluators. They all agree that peer observers relate better to a new teacher's struggles, and that peer evaluations are professional, but when asked if having peer observers was acceptable only 40% of the principals agreed. Surprisingly, the principals did accept that peer observers may offer support for their evaluations of a new teacher.

All three groups believe that having a peer observer would not be too intimidating. More than half of the non-tenured teachers believe it will not deter them from receiving tenure. The tenured teachers were undecided and 40% of the principals believe that it will hinder receiving tenure. A majority of the principals believe that peer observers do not have the correct skills while the tenured and non-tenured teachers had ambivalent results.

Table 4

Accumulative results in percentages of survey by principals,

teachers, and non-tenured teachers.

Number of respondents = 86 1 = Strongly agree and 5 = Strongly disagree

PO = Peer Observers Adm. = Administrators

Abbreviated Questions	1	2	3	4	5
1. Observations by Adm. are unbiased.	10%	24%	46%	16%	4%
2. Adm. perceive teacher perform. accurately.	9	23	41	19	8
3. Adm. spend quality time with new teachers.	1	9	26	40	24
4. PO would give unbiased input.	13	31	42	9	5
5. PO view new teachers differently than Adm.	41	51	8	1	0
6. Teacher tenure observations are fair & equitable.	10	32	35	16	7
7. Observations by Adm. promote quality teaching.	11	16	37	26	10
8. Peer observations hinder collegial relationships.	19	20	43	14	4
9. Peer observations should remain confidential.	63	20	8	5	4
10. Peer observations could deter receiving tenure.	11	19	36	27	7
11. Adm. give practical feedback to new teachers.	9	35	38	15	3
12. PO could offer more practical advice.	27	59	9	3	2
13. PO would be too intimidating.	7	8	27	47	11
14. PO is unnecessary.	7	8	32	37	16
15. PO is acceptable.	18	43	20	10	9
16. PO should be strict evaluators.	1	13	37	28	21
17. PO relate better to a new teacher's struggles.	30	50	10	6	4
18. PO may offer support for Adm. evaluations.	19	50	22	6	3
19. PO may not have the correct skills.	14	25	38	16	7
20. Peer evaluations are unprofessional.	6	2	31	38	23

A shared belief among the three groups; principals, tenured teachers, and non-tenured teachers, is that the evaluations and/or observations made by the peer observer should be confidential and not be used to determine tenure. They agree that peer observers give more practical advice, view new teachers differently than administrators, can relate better to a new teacher's struggles and uncertainties, and that a peer observation may offer support for the administrator's evaluations. A majority also

believed that peer observations are not intimidating or unprofessional and are an acceptable practice. Nearly half of the participants sustained that the mentors needed training, but should not formally evaluate new teachers.

Administrative or peer biases during evaluations are unclear according to the results. One teacher stated, "Before doing peer evaluations, there should be an understanding of what is to be expected. Teachers throughout one school building may have very different beliefs, experiences, and biases. There must be a general understanding and rubric given, that may lessen the bias." Another teacher apprehensive of biases in tenure determination adds, "I think it would be hard to find someone who is unbiased and able and willing to evaluate another. It is unfair to the non-tenured teacher to have a peer pass judgment and effect job status."

Although 79% of the participants believe that peer observations could support the administrator's evaluation, only 14% believe that peers should evaluate strictly. When asked if peer observations could deter a new teacher from receiving tenure, the responses were varied. Nearly one-third answered strongly agreed, strongly disagreed, and at the midway section. The divided responses was also the circumstance for question #7, whether or not an administrator's evaluation of a new teacher promotes quality teaching, and for question #2 if administrators perceive teacher performance accurately. One teacher who does not think administrators perceive teacher performance accurately states, "An administrative observation is not always indicative of teacher performance on a daily basis." Another agrees and adds, "I think that it is difficult for administrators to have a

full and accurate picture of a new teacher when they only come in and observe them two times a year for half an hour. That does nothing to promote growth and monitor progress."

More than half of the participants, however, believe that the administrator's evaluation for tenure is fair and equitable. It is undetermined if peer observations will obstruct collegial relationships. One tenured teacher notes, "I would hate to see peers unwilling to associate with peer evaluators for fear of the evaluator using anything they say or do as something the principal would use in their evaluation." A majority of the respondents believe the administrators do not spend quality time with the non-tenured teachers. Many of the teachers stated that the administrators were burdened with too many administrative issues. This lessened their time with the teaching staff and narrowed their view of varying means of instruction.

Table 5

Results of the participant's comments

Number of survey respondents = 86 Number of comments = 42

Categories of comments	Number of respondents
1. Positive comments	20
2. Negative comments	5
3. Non-committal comments	10

4. Advice giving comments	7

* 60% of the comments were made by tenured teachers, 33% by non-tenured teachers, and 7% were made by the principals.

Most of the comments were positive, but some of the non-committing comments had a "depending" factor; e.g., A non-tenured teacher stated, "I think all of this depends solely on the person doing the observation, whether administrator or peer, and the personality and level of commitment of each one." The advice giving comments were also positive, but each respondent had their own suggestions of how to improve the idea of peer observations; "I think peer observers would be great if the non-tenured teacher could help choose who would be observing." or " Peer observers should be trained. Their main focus should be to be a mentor, someone to offer help." The comments were thoughtful, helpful and offered great insight into how teachers and administrators perceive peer observations.

Discussion

The peer observation method of evaluation is widely accepted among the teachers and administrators of the Clarkston Public School District. The reoccurring themes throughout the survey are: (1) quality time and support for new teachers, (2) training of the peer observer, and (3) assuring that peer observations not be indicative of a teacher receiving tenure. Many who like the idea agree that this should be a mentor who offers assistance and guidance without mainstream input into the administrator's evaluation. It

was suggested that the mentor, new teacher, and principal should work together as a team. This cooperative effort could ensure greater time spent with the new teacher promoting quality teaching.

Taking the mentor program 'one step further' is a logical next step for the Clarkston Public School District. The survey gives every indication that there is a need for revised evaluation. This would entail a greater commitment within the district and approval among the administrators and employees. It would be crucial to train the mentors, generate a rubric listing acceptable qualities of an effective teacher, and to provide the mentors ample time out of their classrooms for the observations of the new teachers. Additionally this could offer an opportunity for the new teachers to observe their mentors. The means of mentor selection and actual performance involves a process that must include experience, personality, trust and commitment. Each of these factors should have a specific qualifying criteria in order to provide competency, consistency and fairness and to avoid any potentially harmful situations. This would be of great assistance to school principals.

Limitations

This study indicates that peer observations are a valuable tool to any school district interested in ensuring effective teaching. However there were limitations. Participants exhibited ignorance or unawareness of the peer observation concept. Also, there were significant variations in teacher's experiences, loyalty in the profession and exposure to a variety of different principals and evaluation systems. Another limitation for this survey

was the time of the year it was executed and the amount of respondents. The survey was administered in May, the busiest time for all schools due to end of the year responsibilities. It was supplied to each of the 6 elementary schools in the district and emphasis on returning the surveys by the principals was different at each building. Therefore only 57% of the teachers and administrators at the elementary level participated and submitted the survey.

Conclusion

The present teacher tenure evaluation system exhibits deficiencies. Evaluations performed solely by administrators lack quality time expenditure, practical feedback, guidance, support, and accurate portrayals of teacher performance. The peer observation method because of its multidiscipline involvement is an obvious advantage that can correct these deficiencies. Teachers need the power and support from an evaluation team that includes actively involved personnel in day to day teaching. Too many new teachers are not fully appreciated and for the most part inadequately assessed and evaluated. Observations by administrators twice a year do not constitute support and guidance to a struggling new teacher, which in the long run may have a rippling effect on the entire community.

Peer assessment of non-tenured teachers is a necessary addition and definite enhancement to the evaluation process. It enables non-tenured teachers to have more guidance and individual support from a master teacher who can relate better to their struggles and spend quality time with them. It provides administrators a more accurate

portrayal of the new teacher's performance and capabilities and allows for more professional growth. Finally, it is a fair and comprehensive system, that promotes the "team concept" - a cohesive aggregate of administrators, mentors and non-tenured teachers contributing to quality education by developing quality teachers.

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Appendix A
Peer Observation Survey

I am studying the benefits and disadvantages of retaining a peer observer (or colleague) to assist the administrator in the evaluation process of non-tenured teachers. The peer would be from within the non-tenured teacher's building and would supplement their growth process. By filling out this survey, you will help me complete my FINAL paper for my Master's Degree in leadership. Please choose your answers as best you can and return it to your building secretary by Friday, May 2. I truly appreciate your time.

Thank You!!
Amy Martocci

*Please circle one: non-tenured teacher tenured teacher principal

SA-Strongly Agree SD- Strongly Disagree	SA				SD
1. Teacher observations by an administrator are unbiased.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Administrator's perceptions of a teacher's performance is accurate and sufficient	1	2	3	4	5
3. An administrator is able to devote quality time to a non-tenured teacher's growth.	1	2	3	4	5
4. A peer observer could offer unbiased input in evaluations.	1	2	3	4	5
5. A peer observer may perceive teacher's actions differently than an administrator.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Teacher observations for tenure are fair and equitable.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Teacher observations by administrators promote quality teaching.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Peer observations could hinder collegial relationships.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Peer observations should remain confidential.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Peer observations could be destructive to teacher's receiving tenure.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Administrators are able to give practical feedback to non-tenured teachers.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Peer observers could offer more practical advice.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Having a peer observer would be too intimidating.	1	2	3	4	5
14. A peer observer is unnecessary.	1	2	3	4	5
15. A peer observer is acceptable.	1	2	3	4	5
16. Peer observers should be strict evaluators.	1	2	3	4	5
17. A peer observer may relate better to a non-tenured teacher's struggles.	1	2	3	4	5
18. Peer observers may offer support for the principal's evaluation.	1	2	3	4	5
19. A peer observer may not have the correct skills.	1	2	3	4	5
20. Peer evaluations are unprofessional.	1	2	3	4	5

COMMENTS ?